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CULTIVATE CHILDREN LIKE FLOWERS

LUTHER BURBANK

Which has the more influence in building the life of a child, heredity or environment? And are acquired characters inherited?

My own observations prove that all characters that are inherited have once been acquired, and that heredity is only the sum of all these past environments, which, if impressed on the heredity long and strong enough in any specific direction, will become part of heredity itself, and this new heredity, already slightly changed by these late environments, will have to meet new environments as before, which will, by repetition, become fixed in the ever new and constantly fluctuating heredity.

Did you ever think what is the most pliable and the most precious product of all the ages? It is not pigs, mules, books, or locomotives, cotton or corn—but children.

Children cannot all be treated alike; each has his or her special individuality, which is the most valuable of all endowments. If all were alike, no progress could be made and right here comes the weakest point in the present educational systems.

I have long been studying the intricate complexity of the action of heredity and environmental forces on life, both in plants and in man, and these comparisons and deductions came clearly, sharply, and naturally. It has been said that to improve a child we should begin with the grandparents. This is only a half-truth, which perhaps had better never have been said. Do not waste any of your time on grandparents unless you commence on them in earliest pliable childhood. If we hope for any improvement on the human race, we must begin with the child, as the child responds more readily to environment than any creature in existence. The change may come in the first generation, and it may not. It may not show at all for many generations, but patience and constant attention will finally be rewarded.

in the survival of the most beautiful, the most precious, or the fittest, whichever you may wish to call it.

In child-rearing, environment is equally essential with heredity. Mind you, I do not say that heredity is of no consequence. It is the great factor and often makes environment almost powerless. When certain hereditary tendencies are almost indelibly ingrained, environment will have a hard battle to effect a change in the child; but that a change can be wrought by the surroundings we all know.

A child absorbs environment. It is the most susceptible thing in the world to influence, and if that force be applied rightly and constantly when the child is in its greatest receptive condition, the effect will be pronounced, immediate, and permanent. There is no doubt that if a child with a vicious temper be placed in an environment of peace and quiet the temper will change. Put a boy born of gentle white parents among Indians and he will grow up like an Indian. Let the child born of criminal parents have a setting of morality and decency, and the chances are that he will not grow up to be a criminal, but an upright man.

I do not say that heredity will not sometimes assert itself, of course. When the criminal instinct crops out in an individual, it might appear as if environment were leveled to the ground, but in succeeding generations the effect of higher environment will not fail to become fixed.

We in America form a nation with the blood of half the peoples of the world in our veins. We are more crossed than any other nation in the history of the world, and here we meet exactly the same results that are always seen in a much-crossed race of plants; all the worst as well as all the best qualities of each are brought out in their fullest intensity, and right here is where selective environment counts.

All the necessary crossing has been done, and now comes the work of elimination, the work of refining, until we shall get an ultimate product that will be the finest human race which has ever been known. It is perhaps this country which will produce that race. Many years will pass before the finished work is attained, but it is sure to come. The characteristics of the many

peoples that make up this nation will show in the composite, with many of the evil characteristics removed, and the finished product will be the race of the future.

In my work with plants and flowers, I introduce color here, shape there, size, or perfume, according to the product desired. In such processes the teachings of nature are always followed. Its great forces only are employed. All that has been done for plants and flowers by crossing, nature has already accomplished for the American people. By the crossing of bloods strength has, in one instance, been secured; in another, intellectuality; in still another, moral force. Nature alone could do this.

Man has by no means reached the ultimate. The fittest has not yet survived. In the process of elimination the weaker must fall, but the battle has changed its base from brute force to mental integrity.

Statistics show many things to make us pause, but after all the proper point of view is that of the optimist. The time will come when insanity will be reduced, suicides and murders will be fewer, and man will become a being of fewer mental troubles and bodily ills.

Wherever you have a nation in which there is no variation there is comparatively little insanity or crime, or exalted morality or genius. Here in America, where the variation is greatest, statistics show a greater percentage of all these variations.

As time goes on in its endless and ceaseless course environment will crystallize the American nation. Its varying elements will become unified, and the weeding-out process will probably leave the finest human product ever known. The color, the perfume, the size and form that are placed in plants will have their analogies in the composite, the American of the future.

And now, what will hasten this development most of all? The proper rearing of children. Don't feed children on maudlin sentimentalism—give them nature. Let their souls drink in all that is pure and sweet. Rear them, if possible, amid pleasant surroundings. If they come into the world with souls groping in the darkness, let them see and feel the light.

Don't terrify them in early life with the fear of an after-

world. Let nature teach them the lessons of good and proper living, combined with an abundance of well-balanced nourishment. Those children will grow to be the best men and women. Put the best in them by contact with the best outside. They will absorb it as a plant does the sunshine and the dew.—*Chicago Tribune*.